

Why Letters Matter: The Importance of Being ICF Credentialed

One of the common questions I hear from coaches, regardless of their time in the industry, is “Do I need a credential to get clients?” My honest answer is “Not necessarily.” Many of us know coaches who do not hold credentials yet still have a full roster of clients and maybe even a waiting list. As coaches, we work with our clients to think boldly and move beyond the labels and constructs of the world at large so they can embrace their own authenticity. What happens when we turn the mirror back on ourselves? Shouldn’t we be free of the need to define our coaching abilities by standards set by others?

The answer to that question is simple, but two-fold. Yes, our skills and experience as coaches have a value that extends beyond letters behind our names or a title on a business card. However, we must also consider the broader impact that credentialing provides not only to the profession, but individually as well.

Would you advise someone to engage with a doctor, lawyer or accountant who did not hold a license/credential from the appropriate governing body of their profession? Even if you knew them to be excellent practitioners, how confident would you be that they possessed (and maintained) the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the services you require? The answer is simple for most of us; of course, we would hire the professional with the appropriate credentials without question. So why do we not hold to those same standards within our own profession?

In this rapidly growing industry, it is important for the advancement of the coaching profession that we continue to show our commitment to the highest levels of training, competency and ethics. Since coaching is not formally or centrally regulated legally, the [ICF Credential](#) provides coaches with immediate recognition as coaching professionals who have submitted to a combination of accredited training, coaching hours, assessment and compliance with standards of practice that allows current/potential clients and the broader communities we operate in to trust that they are working with a qualified coach.

As to the earlier question of whether an ICF Credential is required to engage clients, in some cases, the answer is 100 percent yes. Organizations whether corporate, government or nonprofit are increasingly requesting, if not requiring, that all coaches they work with hold an ACC, PCC or MCC Credential from ICF.

Many won’t even look at you without it, and some have gone so far as to inform coaches they have worked with for years that they will need to obtain an ICF Credential in order to renew contracts or to be considered for future engagements. As corporate clients continue to require this standard, it is not unrealistic to expect that individuals will begin and already are factoring credentials more seriously into their own decision making when selecting a coach.

Finally, when we think of our own growth as coaches, the ongoing exposure to continuing education, training and industry developments we gain when we hold an ICF Credential allows us to continue to develop our coaching skills to serve our clients to the best of our ability. Again, I ask, would you want to work with a doctor who had no training beyond medical school 20, 10, or even five years ago? I realize that as coaches we are not practicing neurosurgery or cardiology, but we are entrusted with helping people make decisions that significantly impact the entire course of their lives, whether it relates to career, family, life-long goals or intensely private personal challenges and behaviors.

Holding an ICF Credential does not encompass all that we are as coaches by any means, but it does reflect a tangible level of commitment to providing the highest quality of professional care to our clients.